

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF MR. JOHN SMITH IN PARIS

IN FOUR PARTS—Part III.

CHAPTER X.

FOR the major part of the day and all the evening following the mysterious disappearance of one million five hundred thousand dollars' worth of United States bonds from the shabby little room in the Rue St. Honore, Mr. John Smith hovered about the lobby of the Maison de Treville like an uneasy bill collector. He had been expecting something, he didn't know what. A letter? Perhaps. A telegram? Maybe. A call in person? Not at all unlikely. Whatever form it might take, it was coming, a something from the void, an illuminating, starlike light to lead him through the maze. He was perfectly convinced of it, albeit the conviction was based upon nothing more substantial than a well developed Passaic hunch.

Shortly after nine o'clock he strolled around the corner into the Rue de Seine to invest fifty centimes of hard earned American cash in a bad cigar—all cigars being bad in Paris. As he reentered the lobby, the night clerk, that astute young man with the ingratiating smile and the delicately waxed mustache, picked up a letter and held it aloft.

"Billet pneumatique, Monsieur," he announced.

"Who?" asked Mr. Smith.

"Billet pneumatique."

"You can search me, son; I don't know him."

The clerk shrugged his shoulders hopelessly, walked round the desk, and placed the letter in Mr. Smith's hand.

Mr. Smith glanced at the superscription. "Oh, for me. I thought you said it was for Billy somebody."

The handwriting was a woman's. Now that it had come, Mr. Smith knew that it was precisely what he had been expecting. Of course it was from a woman! He had known all along that it would be! He dropped into a settle in a corner and opened the letter. It was like this:

To-night at 10.30 taxicab will pick you up at the north side of obelisk in Place de la Concorde. Matter of greatest importance to you.

There was no signature. Mr. Smith had expected none. He glanced at his watch,—it was nine-twenty-seven,—after which he sat for a long time with utter blankness in his straight staring eyes. His meditations were not unpleasant, if one might judge from a certain softness about his mouth, almost a smile. Perhaps he was dreaming of Passaic. Whatever it was, he was brought back to cold, sordid earth by the approach of a stranger who had entered, a small man of indeterminate age, immaculate, even foppish, in dress, with a pair of evil eyes in the head of him.

"PARDON me," said the stranger in English, "this is M. John Smith?"

"Of Passaic, New Jersey. Yes, sir."

"Permit me to introduce myself, Monsieur. I am the Marquis d'Aubigny."

He bowed low and presented his card. Mr. Smith read the name and bowed lower. There was a certain uneasy air of surprise in his manner. To his broad, democratic mind, Kings and Queens and Dukes and Marquises were exalted persons who walked the face of the earth with crowns on their heads. This chap had on a silk hat.

"It is the great pleasure, Monsieur, to meet you."

"Same to you, sir." Mr. Smith was holding up one foot awkwardly with a crushing sense of having failed in the formalities. "Have a seat, Mr.—er—er— Sit down."

M. le Marquis disposed himself gracefully, languidly, on the settle. He reminded Mr. Smith of some one, strangely. Suddenly he knew who it was. It was Richard Mansfield as Baron Chevalier. That was it, that disgusting, loathesome, marvelous creation of an actor's art! Verily, here was Bill Roué in person—so, to Mr. Smith's unembroidered Passaic mind. Mr. Smith sat down gingerly.

"I have come to you on a little matter of busi-

BY JACQUES FUTRELLE

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

JOHN SMITH was assistant paying teller of a bank in Passaic, New Jersey, who had arrived in Paris with one hundred and seventy-three dollars in his pocket. He was seeking W. Mandeville Clarke. Others were also interested in Clarke's movements; for the hotel clerk, who did not understand English, when asked if Clarke was stopping there, thought that Smith himself was Clarke, and told Remi, a Paris detective. Then Smith went on a tour of Paris looking for Clarke; and Paris detectives followed Smith about. The gendarmes had no authority to arrest Clarke; but just to keep him in view. A mysterious woman was also inquiring for Clarke, and also wondering why Smith was seeking him.

Smith saw Clarke and his daughter Edna (the "mysterious woman") in a restaurant just as Smith was arrested under the name of Clarke. Smith submitted to the arrest for the sake of the woman. He was released when the Paris police became convinced that he was a detective and was not Clarke.

Clarke had stolen a million and a half in bonds from the Passaic bank of which he was president, and when he looked in his bag for them they were gone.

them. Neither is it necessary to touch upon your personal relations with M. Clarke. It is enough to say that you have misunderstood him. He is an honest man, as you are. A vast business deal has been interrupted by your unexpected interference. It is a deal that will bring an enormous profit. It must be consummated! I come to you, therefore, direct from M. Clarke, to offer you a share of the profits that may accrue, upon the condition that you return the bonds immediately, you to go back at once to the United States,—we know you have engaged passage from Cherbourg on Wednesday; so this fits in with your plans,—and once in the United States you are to take necessary action to protect M. Clarke until such time as he can get there, and then— Is it necessary to go on?"

"Engaged passage from Cherbourg on Wednesday!" There was an odd little intonation in Mr. Smith's voice. "You are hep to my plans, all right, aren't you? How much profit do I get, if I do all this?"

"One hundred thousand dollars, Monsieur."

"One hundred thousand dollars!" Mr. Smith was speaking with irritating deliberation. D'Aubigny's keen eyes searched the rugged face and found—nothing. "And if there are no profits?"

M. le Marquis shrugged his shoulders. "Then nothing, Monsieur. You take your chance with the rest of us. There are ninety-nine reasons why we should make a profit, and only one why we shouldn't. If we fail, of course M. Clarke is ruined, I am ruined, all of us; but we won't fail."

"If you get the bonds," Mr. Smith stipulated.

"We have the utmost faith in your discretion, Monsieur. One hundred thousand dollars is a great fortune."

"You seem to have no doubt that I have the bonds," Mr. Smith observed calmly. "May I ask how you came to know I have them?"

"Details are tiresome, Monsieur," remarked the Marquis evasively. "There were only three persons in Paris, in the world, I may say, who knew the bonds were in this city, these being M. Clarke, you, and myself. He hasn't them, I didn't get them; therefore—do you see?"

"But how did you come to know I have them?" Mr. Smith insisted. "I want to know."

WELL, the trained nurse—his disappearance gave us the clue." The Marquis seemed to be tremendously bored. "After M. Clarke's meeting with you, he was ill, and it was necessary to re-engage this nurse. He came to the house, remained there just two hours, then disappeared utterly. M. Clarke kept the bonds in the little leather bag under the sheets. Only the nurse could have found them."

"Perhaps you give me too much credit," Mr. Smith protested. "Maybe the nurse pinched them on his own account."

The tentative suggestion startled the Marquis for a moment; then he smiled shrewdly as he stared into the impassive face before him.

"It is idle to talk so, Monsieur. Besides, the nurse does not speak or read English and, while he might have been bribed to get the bonds for you, he on his own account wouldn't have known what they were about. We don't underestimate your activities since you have been in Paris. We admit that you are clever, and we are willing to pay for that cleverness—pay one hundred thousand dollars."

"Other people might have known about the bonds," Mr. Smith insisted; "his daughter, for instance."

"She could not know, Monsieur." The Marquis was quite positive about it. "She is innocent as a child; she would not have understood, anyway." There was a slight pause. "I have heard it said, Monsieur, that America had no beautiful women. It is not true."

Something in his tone caused Mr. Smith to turn



"I Must Know Why You Followed My Father to Paris!"

ness, Monsieur," the Marquis said slowly, impressively. "I come from M. Clarke."

"Oh!" Mr. Smith stared at him for an instant, then rose and paced the length of the lobby twice with his fingers gripped behind him. When he paused in front of the Marquis, his eyes had grown steely, his powerful jaws were set. "What business?" he demanded abruptly.

Marquis d'Aubigny permitted his wicked little eyes to wander about the lobby. There was no one in sight except the night clerk.

"He doesn't speak English," said Mr. Smith shortly. "Go on!"

IT is not for us, Monsieur, to ask you how you got possession of the bonds, or to go into trivial details to show how we came to know that you have